



A MONTHLY JOURNAL
FOR IOWA EDUCATORS

School Leader Update

December 2017

Postsecondary readiness website updated with new data

The Iowa Department of Education has updated a [state website](#) that serves as an indicator of how well-prepared students are for success in postsecondary education and training upon graduation from public high schools in Iowa.

Iowa's Postsecondary Readiness Reports, a website launched earlier this year, provides student postsecondary enrollment patterns, remedial course-taking rates, and postsecondary retention and completion rates that can be connected to every public high school in Iowa.

Data are available statewide and by Iowa high school, as well as by student demographic subgroup, such as race/ethnicity and eligibility for free and reduced-price meals. [Read more.](#)



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Transforming the teaching profession

I taught high school social studies for five years and my job responsibilities on my last day looked very much like those on my first. In addition, my academic department of nearly 20 teachers offered one leadership role – department chair (which required a Master's degree and was confined mostly to scheduling substitute teachers and adopting new textbooks every few years). And the limited time we shared as a team was spent on updates and announcements, not on meaningful professional learning.

Based on my weekly school visits and on data from two new reports, I know most teachers in Iowa today have a very different experience than I had when I taught. Iowa has changed the nature of the teaching profession for the better.

Nearly 10,000 teachers hold formal, compensated leadership roles through the Teacher Leadership and Compensation (TLC) system. Teachers no longer shut the door to their classroom and engage with other teachers a few times a year for professional development of varying quality and limited connection to their actual jobs. They engage weekly in connected, high-quality professional learning and collaborate daily with their colleagues.

I've seen many examples of this approach in the first half of this school year:

- I was in Center Point-Urbana recently and participated in a district-wide professional learning session in which teams of teachers (led by teacher leaders) gathered together, reviewed student achievement data and planned specific interventions for students who were below their academic benchmarks.
- In Williamsburg last month, I visited with the high school and middle school English teachers and an instructional coach who meet each week and also share all of their lessons and assessments in a Google Documents file.



Director Ryan Wise

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- And in Rock Valley in October, I visited the classroom of a model teacher who was piloting a new technology application in his classroom, which he would then evaluate and share with other teachers.

These personal observations are also supported by data in two new reports. The [first report](#), developed by the Iowa Department of Education, summarizes the information provided in the end-of-year reports submitted by each of Iowa's 333 school districts, all of which implemented a local TLC plan during the 2016 – 2017 school year. This report highlights some encouraging data:

- Overall, 75 percent of districts fully or mostly met their TLC goals.
- 85 percent of districts fully or mostly met their goal to attract and retain teachers.
- 84 percent fully or mostly met their collaboration and professional growth goals.
- 50 percent fully or mostly met their achievement goals, based on a variety of assessments, including state and local tests.

The [second report](#), developed by the American Institutes for Research (AIR) as part of an external evaluation of TLC, found that 87 percent of teachers and 93 percent of administrators agree strongly or agree somewhat about the effectiveness of TLC in improving instruction. In addition, the positive perceptions increased in 2017 compared to 2016, which reinforces that it takes time to maximize the benefits of teacher leadership. This is not a “quick-fix” approach. Instead, this is about redesigning the profession for long-term, sustainable improvement.

While these are just a few examples of the positive impact of TLC, I also know from both my visits and these reports that we still have work to do, especially in ensuring we maximize the impact teacher leadership has on student achievement. As I mentioned in a previous column, I met several times this fall with a team of educators from across Iowa to examine the use of instructional frameworks, which are also referred to as instructional rubrics, and to determine how we might expand the use of these tools across the state. While the idea may have multiple names, the focus is on creating a common instructional language and vision for quality teaching across an entire school district. In my observations, schools that do this are best positioned to maximize the impact of teacher leaders.

The Department will also continue to rigorously evaluate TLC and share what we've learned from school districts that are seeing the greatest results. AIR is in the process of selecting six school districts to develop in-depth case studies on the decisions and strategies that have resulted in successful implementation and outcomes. We anticipate these case studies will be completed and released following the end of the school year and will be a helpful resource to all school districts as they continue to strengthen their local plans.

In addition, the Department continues to host a monthly TLC implementation team, which includes representatives from each Area Education Agency, school districts, and the state's professional education associations. This group's purpose is to identify, coordinate and provide learning opportunities for teachers across the state as they enter leadership roles.

And finally, the statewide Teacher Leadership Commission continues to meet and discuss ways in which Iowa can improve TLC implementation. Although Iowa is only in the second year of TLC implementation, we know we will see a stronger, positive impact on student achievement moving forward. We will continue to work with Iowa educators to ensure this happens.

Ryan M. Wise

TLC resources and coaching networks

The Department is also working to support teacher leaders in building their content knowledge and coaching skills in a range of areas through the resources and coaching networks linked below.

[Lead, Teach, Learn](#)

[Literacy News You Can Use](#)

[Iowa Science Coaching Network](#)

[Social Studies Update Newsletter](#)

[Instructional Coaches and Teacher Leaders Math Network](#)

[TLC system reports](#)

Literacy: Solutions to closing the gap

Path to Reading Excellence in School Sites (PRESS)

Buena Vista University, Siebens Forum Building, Storm Lake

Overall growth in literacy for all students is dependent upon strong core instruction in the classroom. Components of a research-based coaching tool and observation checklist that support improvement in literacy will be demonstrated at our upcoming trainings.

Participants who attend will be provided with clear next steps to begin their small group interventions through an overview of the data-driven diagnostic process in tier 2. A focus is placed on continuous progress monitoring, both at the skill and grade level, as well as decision making using ongoing, reliable data collection. As the importance of intervention fidelity is reviewed, participants learn effective components of interventions.

Feb. 15 - 12:30 - 4 p.m.

PRESS Classwide Interventions

[RE039199611801](#) \$35 + materials if needed

For classroom teachers, literacy coaches, and others providing whole class instruction.

Learn an efficient process for data teams to analyze screening data and plan supplemental tier 1 supports for whole-class implementation. We introduce a process for examining student data and using a protocol to guide instructional decisions. Specifically, we demonstrate a class-wide intervention framework for classrooms where over half of students have been identified as below grade-level on a universal screening measure. This process helps strengthen core instruction and, within a short time frame of 10 days, the number of students requiring intervention can be significantly reduced.

Feb. 16 - 9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

PRESS Tier 2 Interventions & Introduction to Progress Monitoring

[RE038499611801](#) \$60 + materials if needed

For classroom teachers, interventionists, literacy coaches, and others providing small group interventions.

Determine targeted, small group interventions using the PRESS data-driven decision making process. Learn how to identify students' intervention needs using the PRESS diagnostic tools and then select and implement specific, skill-based interventions from the PRESS Intervention Manual. Consider the components of effective interventions and implementation fidelity. An introduction to continuous progress monitoring is provided with an emphasis on decision making using ongoing, reliable data collection.



Does your student want to serve on the Board of Education?

Applications are being accepted for the student member of the State Board of Education.

Each year the Governor appoints a student to serve as a nonvoting member of the State Board of Education. The term of the student member starts May 1, 2018, and ends April 30, 2019. The State Board meets at least seven times during that term, with most meetings taking place in the Grimes State Office Building in Des Moines. The deadline for submitting an application with all required documents is Feb. 1.

Besides being a full-time, regularly enrolled 10th or 11th grade student in a public high school, the student must meet these requirements:

- Has a GPA of at least 3.0 (4.0 scale) or 3.75 (5.0 scale).
- Has attended his/her present high school at least the past two consecutive semesters (or the equivalent thereof).
- Demonstrates participation in extracurricular and community activities, as well as an interest in serving on the board.

The number of applicants in a year from any one district is limited as follows:

- If district enrollment for grades 10 through 12 is less than 400 students, there may be no more than one applicant from the district.
- If district enrollment for grades 10 through 12 is from 400 to 1,199 students, there may be no more than two applicants from the district.
- If district enrollment for grades 10 through 12 is 1,200 students or more, there may be no more than three applicants from the district.

The application and supporting documents for the student member of the State Board of Education are available [here](#).

Iowa Learning Online spring enrollment now open

[Iowa Learning Online](#) is excited to announce over 40 course offerings for spring 2018 including economics, health, trigonometry, marine science, art history, five world languages and many more. We are also offering the first semester of almost every course. Visit the ILO website for a complete [course list](#). To better meet individual student needs and diverse schedules of Iowa schools, ILO will offer two separate cohorts during the term offset by two weeks.

Spring 2018 Cohort A: Jan. 2 to May 4 (early enrollment ends at 4 p.m. Jan. 16)

Spring 2018 Cohort B: Jan. 16 to May 18 (early enrollment ends at 4 p.m. Jan. 29)

Spring 2018 enrollment is open. The Iowa Learning Online registrar at registrar@iowalearningonline.org or 515-725-2075 can assist with all enrollment requests and/or account inquiries while ILO transitions to a new student information system (SIS).



Implementing the math standards

Focus strongly where the standards focus

The standards call for a greater focus in mathematics. Rather than racing to cover topics in a mile-wide, inch-deep curriculum, College and Career Readiness standards require us to significantly narrow and deepen the way time and energy are spent in the math classroom. We focus deeply on the Major Work of each grade so that students can gain strong foundations: solid conceptual understanding, a high degree of procedural skill and fluency, and the ability to apply the math they know to solve problems inside and outside the math classroom.

Students should spend the large majority of their time on the major work of the grade. Supporting work and, where appropriate, additional work can engage students in the major work of the grade. Emphases are given at the cluster level. Refer to the [Achieve the Core Focus documents](http://bit.ly/iamathfocus), <http://bit.ly/iamathfocus>, for Mathematics for the specific standards that fall within each cluster.

Implementing the Standards Tips - Focus

- Focus ensures the Iowa Core Mathematics Standards are more than a checklist
- A math curriculum that is an inch wide and a mile deep requires Focus
- Focus is the first Shift and it is difficult to have Coherence or Rigor without it
- The Major Clusters are the Focus of each grade level for K-8 and for HS
- Focus means that up to 85 percent of instructional time is used to ensure students have the opportunities to learn the major clusters
- Without focus on the major clusters, students may not be learning what they need to be successful at the next grade level
- Focus is not about the number of major clusters or the number of standards in those clusters
- Focus on the major clusters ensures College and Career Readiness

Implementing the Shifts in the Mathematic Standards <http://bit.ly/iacblog> Moving from unpacking to understanding the mathematics standards <http://bit.ly/IAMS17>. For questions, contact April Pforts at april.pforts@iowa.

State Board adopts new fine arts standards for Iowa schools

Members of the State Board of Education adopted new fine arts standards for students in preschool through 12th grade.

The board adopted, based on an Iowa's team's recommendation, the National Core Arts Standards, which are used in 22 states and were developed by an alliance of national arts and arts education groups. The standards are optional for Iowa schools.

Fine arts generally include visual arts, music, theater, dance and media arts.

[Read more.](#)



'Emerging Educators Conference' coming Jan. 22, register now

The Outstanding Educators' Academy of the Iowa Department of Education, in collaboration with ISEA and Simpson College, are hosting the 3rd Annual Emerging Educators Conference: "New Year's Resolution for Effective Educators." The conference will be at Simpson College, Kent Campus Center on Jan. 22 from 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. The conference is for first- to third-year beginning educators and their mentors, specialists/facilitators, instructional coaches, and administrators. It is also for college-level junior and senior pre-service educators and their professors.

Participants will have the opportunity to learn from and collaborate with outstanding Iowa educators, professional leaders, and Department of Education consultants to focus on recruiting and retaining effective educators. Beginning educator breakout sessions will focus on ethics, classroom management, Iowa teaching standards, 21st century skills, and characteristics of effective instruction. Administrators, mentors, and coaches will focus on the Iowa Mentoring Program, effective teacher induction programs, and important statewide updates. To register go to [3rd Annual Emerging Educators Conference](#).

When the lines begin to blur between special and general education teachers, good things happen

You'd be hard pressed to pin down just one thing Gilbert Intermediate School is doing right. That's because the school is doing, well, basically everything just right.

And that means students – all students – are achieving. Indeed, 79 percent of students on Individual Education Programs are proficient in math and reading, compared to a statewide average of 35 percent. In fact, Gilbert Intermediate outperformed every other school in Iowa when it comes to educating students on IEPs; three years' worth of data were used to determine this. [Read more](#).



General education teacher Kristy Danilson rolls up her sleeves to ensure high academic success among all students.

Just because we want you here:

SPECIAL EDUCATION SYMPOSIUM



will be held **June 11-12, 2018**
at the **Iowa Events Center**

Save the date!

The architecture of accessible learning materials (AIM/AEM)

Each time your district purchases curriculum (textbook or digital), you have an opportunity to expand access to learning materials for all students in the district. Some key accessibility features:

- text-to-speech (read aloud) for the body of text as well as captions and definitions
- magnification and visual contrast options
- alt-text tags for graphics
- simple-to-use navigation tools between text sections



Each time your district upgrades or purchases new technology, you have an opportunity to select technologies that support accessible curriculum or can be made accessible through assistive technology. Some key considerations for accessible technologies:

- Computers and Chromebooks: accessibility tools built-in to the operating system for vision/reading/motor needs (e.g. high contrast text/background, text-to-speech, voice input, magnification, large cursor option)
- Mobile devices: voice input, text to speech, magnification, adjustments to display, control to guide access to apps

The [Architecture of AIM \(Acquisition of Accessible Instructional Materials\)](#) infographic can help guide you to determine the strength of your accessibility foundation. For AIM technical assistance and/or support, email iaaem@iowa.gov

Districts get creative to combat chronic absenteeism

It stands to reason that when a student is absent, the child isn't learning. For students who are chronically absent – defined as being out of class 10 percent or more – the effects can be academically devastating, potentially jeopardizing the success they could have in both school and life-time careers.

To that end, the Iowa Department of Education has created a [resource page](#) for schools to combat chronic absences, as well as a [report](#) showing best practices going on in Iowa's school districts.

Find out how the Council Bluffs, Denison, and Muscatine school districts address the problem:

[Personalized approach to attendance improves academics, too](#)

[Communicating the importance of attendance in any language](#)

[Relationships crucial to combating absence in Muscatine](#)

Iowa's teacher leadership system is making a difference



Gov. Kim Reynolds and Lt. Gov. Adam Gregg announced two new reports that show how Iowa's Teacher Leadership and Compensation System is changing the nature of the teaching profession in the state. Reynolds and Gregg were joined at a news conference by Iowa Department of Education Director Ryan Wise and 2017 Iowa Teacher of the Year Shelly Vroegh of Norwalk.

Read the [news release](#).

Financial incentive to obtain deaf, hard of hearing endorsement

The Iowa Department of Education again has named teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing as a teacher shortage area. In an effort to support training of teachers in this special area of endorsement, two financial incentive options are available to interested licensed teachers: 1) a federally funded grant or 2) a state-funded partial tuition reimbursement.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) developed a federally funded grant, known as the Mid-Plains Professional Upgrade Partnership - Sensory Disabilities (MPUP-SD), to address this critical shortage area in Nebraska and the surrounding Mid-Plains states. The MPUP-SD grant provides funding to prospective students who want to earn their endorsement in educating students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Several teachers across Iowa have worked full time while completing the UNL Deaf Education graduate program, which is delivered online with some on-site requirements.

A requirement of the MPUP-SD program is that applicants possess a current and valid teaching license. Participants may apply for the Graduate Certificate in Sensory Disabilities and earn an endorsement in Deaf Education; or, by taking two additional classes, may also complete a master's degree. (It is highly encouraged that anyone without a master's degree pursue this option.) Interested applicants would apply directly to UNL (see information listed below).

The Iowa Department of Education, in partnership with Iowa School for the Deaf, is offering a financial alternative for candidates accepted into this program. Candidates who are accepted into the UNL program will then have the option to select 1) terms of the MPUP federal grant or 2) terms of an agreement for the Iowa Grow Your Own tuition reimbursement program.

Iowa Grow Your Own tuition reimbursement program includes:

- Willingness to complete at least three (3) years of employment within Iowa as a teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing. Employment opportunities include positions across the continuum of services with any employing agency: local school district, area education agency, or Iowa School for the Deaf.
- Willingness to consider relocation within Iowa in order to fulfill employment agreement.
- Tuition reimbursement for up to 80 percent of each course, payable throughout the program upon proof of successful completion of each course.

Additional information:

- [Information about the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Mid-Plains Professional Upgrade Partnership - Sensory Disabilities \(MPUP-SD\)](#)
- [Information about licensure and endorsement - Iowa Deaf and Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Information about teacher shortage areas in Iowa](#)

Note: Funding preferences are for candidates who apply to the MPUP-SD program by Jan. 15, for fall 2018 program start date. Application information is found [here](#).

Conditional licensure coursework progress

Many of your staff members may hold a conditional license while they complete the coursework required to fully add a new endorsement. Districts are often surprised in August when they find out that a staff member has not completed enough coursework to either add the endorsement or to continue with conditional licensure. The district is then faced with the challenge of having a late opening in a shortage area.

Many Iowa districts have implemented policies to require any educator on a conditional license to check in with a designated administrator each semester to provide evidence of coursework progress. This allows the district and the educator to have open communication about licensure expectations and timelines and it alleviates unexpected issues. This is a great time to check in with your educators who hold conditional licensure to ensure sufficient coursework progress is being made.

Does your district have the next Teacher of the Year?

Thousands of talented Iowa educators lead and inspire their students, but only one is chosen annually as the state's ambassador to education. The deadline to nominate the 2019 Iowa Teacher of the Year is April 27.

The award is an opportunity to recognize an exceptional Iowa teacher who is helping redefine education. Nominations will be accepted from anyone, including students, parents, school administrators, colleagues, college faculty members, and associations.

Nomination forms can be found [here](#).

The Iowa Teacher of the Year award was established in 1958. The annual program is sponsored by the Iowa Department of Education through an appropriation from the Iowa Legislature. Winners are chosen by a committee that includes representatives of the Iowa Department of Education, the Iowa State Education Association, the School Administrators of Iowa, the Parent Teachers Association, the Area Education Agencies, the Iowa Association of School Boards, the Iowa Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, and the current Iowa Teacher of the Year.

The Teacher of the Year serves as an ambassador to education and as a liaison to primary and secondary schools, higher education, and organizations across the state. Aileen Sullivan of Ames Community School District was named the 2018 Teacher of the Year.

Q-and-A with the 2018 Teacher of the Year

Aileen Sullivan is the Iowa Department of Education's 2018 Iowa Teacher of the Year.

Sullivan, 43, a chemistry teacher, has taught at Ames High since 1996. Passionate about student-centered learning,

Sullivan said putting students in charge of their own learning leads to deeper-thinking skills – and keeps them engaged. [Read](#) some of her thoughts about teaching.



2018 Iowa Teacher of the Year
Aileen Sullivan

A message from the 2017 Teacher of the Year: Shelly Vroegh



2017 Iowa Teacher of the Year
Shelly Vroegh

This fall has been a whirlwind for me, and it's hard to believe it's already December. As Iowa's Teacher of the Year I have been busy this fall traveling across the state speaking to pre-service teachers, educators, instructional coaches and administrators. One of my biggest passions is to recruit and retain educators to our profession, and being the teacher of the year has given me the chance to spread that message through a workshop entitled Find Your Marigolds: The Seeds for Success in Teachers.

The message in the workshop is that teaching is hard and we can't do it alone. As I move into the second half of my year representing Iowa's teachers, I look forward to sharing this message and others with educators across the state. If your school is interested in having me visit to speak and do a workshop, you can contact me at shelly.vroegh@iowa.gov.

Data and Reporting

Districts earn gold, platinum star status for certified enrollment

The Iowa Department of Education Student Reporting in Iowa (SRI) team recognizes the hard work by districts and non-publics during the certified enrollment process. Gold star districts and non-publics made full use of the test site in September, had data to certified enrollment on Oct. 6, and were certified at the close of the day on Oct. 15.

Gold star public districts 2017:

Allamakee, Ames, Bettendorf, Boyer Valley, West Hancock, Carroll, Cedar Rapids, Central DeWitt, Central Springs, Dike-New Hartford, East Sac County, Graettinger-Terril, Griswold, Howard-Winneshiek, Janesville, Laurens-Marathon, Le Mars, Lewis Central, Linn-Mar, Maquoketa, Mid-Prairie, Mount Pleasant, Mount Vernon, North Mahaska, Norwalk, Panorama, Paton-Churdan, PCM, Pleasant Valley Prairie Valley, Sergeant Bluff-Luton, Sioux City, Storm Lake, Union, Waterloo, Webster City

Gold star non-public schools 2017:

All Saints Catholic School-Davenport, All Saints School-Cedar Rapids, Archbishop Hennessy Catholic School, Beckman Catholic High School, Bishop Garrigan Schools, Burlington Notre Dame Schools, Cedar Valley Catholic School System, Holy Cross Center, Holy Family School System, Immaculate Conception-Charles City., John F Kennedy Catholic School-Davenport, Keokuk Catholic Schools St. Vincent's School, Marquette Catholic School System, Newman Catholic School System, Notre Dame Elementary School-Cresco, Regis Middle School, Sacred Heart School-Maquoketa, Seton Catholic School System, St Athanasius School-Jesup, St Benedict School-Decorah, St Cecilia School-Ames, St Francis Catholic School-Marshalltown, St Francis Xavier School-Dyersville, St John Elementary-Independence, St Joseph School-De Witt, St Joseph School-Marion, St Marys School-Guttenberg, St Matthew School-Cedar Rapids, St Patrick School-Anamosa, St Patrick School-Cedar Falls, St Patrick School-Waukon, St Paul The Apostle-Davenport, St Pius X School-Cedar Rapids, St Thomas Aquinas School-Webster City, The Bosco System, Trinity Catholic School-Protivin, Xavier High School

The following public districts attained platinum star status for meeting the requirements for the gold star status and requiring no modifications or corrections to data after Oct.15.

Platinum star districts 2017:

Adair-Casey, Adel DeSoto Minburn, Akron Westfield, Anamosa, Battle Creek-Ida Grove, Baxter, BCLUW, Bedford, Bellevue, Calamus-Wheatland, Cardinal, Chariton, Clayton Ridge, Clinton, Colfax-Mingo, Corning, Delwood, Earlham, East Buchanan, Eastern Allamakee, Eldora-New Providence, Guthrie Center, Hamburg, Harris-Lake Park, Hartley-Melvin-Sanborn, Highland, IKM-Manning, Independence, Interstate 35, Knoxville, Lone Tree, Maquoketa Valley, Marcus-Meriden-Cleghorn, Marshalltown, Martensdale-St Marys, Midland, MOC-Floyd Valley, Newell-Fonda, North Winneshiek, Northwood-Kensett, Odebolt-Arthur, Rock Valley, Roland-Story, Ruthven-Ayrshire, Schleswig, Seymour, Sibley-Ocheyedan, Sioux Central, South Hamilton, South O'Brien, Southeast Webster Grand, Stanton, Treynor, Tri-County, Tripoli, Twin Cedars, United, Waco, Washington, West Bend-Mallard, West Central, West Central Valley, West Harrison, Winfield-Mt Union, Winterset

Early Childhood Preschool Programs

Expansion of SWVPP for four-year-old children

School districts not currently participating in the [Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program](#) (SWVPP) may [apply](#) to become part of the program. The new application to begin a preschool program in 2018-19 is posted to the SWVPP web page. This application will be due April 6.

This non-competitive application will require districts to fund the preschool program using other funding sources in 2018-19. HF 565, a bill that passed during the 2017 legislative session, enables districts to move unexpended, unobligated funding from certain sources to a new flexibility fund account within the general fund. These sources include the professional development supplement, home school assistance program funds, and any other school district fund or school district general fund account if the program, purpose, or requirements for the expenditure of such funding have been repealed or are no longer in effect. Through a board resolution that includes specific stipulations as described in 298A.2, districts can then use these funds for their Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program, including startup costs.

In their second year of SWVPP implementation, districts will receive state aid based on the number of eligible children served in year one. New districts are encouraged to review the application as well as the [FAQs](#) in the development of the application.

School districts currently participating do not need to reapply.

For information about the Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four-Year-Old Children, contact Jennifer Adkins at 515-954-5652 or jennifer.adkins@iowa.gov.





Legal Lessons

Contact Nicole Proesch for all Legal Lessons items: nicole.proesch@iowa.gov or 515-281-8661

Reminders: Holiday celebrations, snow days, and visas

In our house we have been preparing for the holidays since the day after Halloween. Yes that's right, we started that early. My husband has always been a little kid at heart during this time of year and has earned the nickname "Hermey," the elf from Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer, because of it. He can't wait to get our decorations out. We have an inside joke with friends and family about when he will put up our tree. They all think waiting until after Thanksgiving should be the rule.



But in my house we break that rule. We put no time to waste getting up lights and other decorations to celebrate the season as soon as possible. We love the holiday season and spending time with family. We love to buy gifts, give gifts to others, and to see the excitement when they open them. This is our favorite time of the year. 'Tis the season to be merry!

Our kids have inherited our love of the season as well. This year they begged to put decorations out as soon as the pumpkins came down. I think this year they are even more excited to buy gifts for others than they are to get gifts themselves. My oldest was calculating how to spend her own gift cards on family and friends for presents. I reminded her that if she made a gift it would mean just as much because it really is the thought that counts. That hasn't swayed her J. Both of them have already donated gifts to Toys for Tots. It's fun to see their excitement about giving to others and enjoying time with family. I hope you enjoy the season of giving as much as we do and don't forget to take a little break from all the giving you do all year long to schools to spend time with your family and friends, too.

Now, in preparation for this holiday season in this edition of Legal Lessons, I bring you some old but good guidance for this time of year: *Important Reminders* on Religious Holiday Celebrations in Public Schools, Snow Days and Hours Guidance Revisited, and last but not least information on Foreign Exchange Students.

Important reminders on religious holiday celebrations in public schools

♪ "Have a holly jolly, Christmas it's the best time of the year..." ♪ Hmm; well, perhaps not for everyone. Public school officials need to be especially conscious at this time of year that Christmas is not recognized or celebrated by all students and families. Therefore, here is a quick (not meant to be exhaustive) checklist of what public school officials are prohibited from doing and what they are permitted to do.

a. PROHIBITED Activities

- Displays of religious symbols such as a crèche, an angel, a menorah, or a banner with a religious message ("Gloria in Excelsis Deo," e.g.).
- Display of a Christmas tree with religious symbols such as stars, angels, the Baby Jesus.
- School-wide prayer or Scripture readings.
- Banning students from offering candy canes or other items with a religious message during noninstructional time (before or after school or during a recess) and NOT done in the classroom. Schools may still prohibit distribution within classrooms.

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- Holding a “Christmas party” in the classroom. A “holiday” or “end of semester” or “end of 2017” party is OK.

b. PERMISSIBLE Activities

- Including religious music selections during public holiday concerts if non-religious music is included. See guidance from the Iowa High School Music Association ([Guidance from IHSMA](#)).
- Holding holiday concerts at religious sites if the concerts are also held at non-religious sites.
- Displaying a “giving tree,” i.e. a tree on which students hang donated items such as mittens, gloves, etc.
- Displays of religious symbols *when combined with* other symbols of cultural and ethnic heritage such as Kwanzaa symbols, Frosty the Snowman, other festive figures, a “Happy Holidays” banner, etc.
- Displays of symbols representing many religious beliefs, even without non-religious symbols. But, just displaying symbols from Christianity and Judaism is an impermissible endorsement of dual beliefs. The display must present a message of pluralism and freedom to choose one’s own beliefs.

Districts should however strive to be inclusive and attain equity for ALL STUDENTS regardless of their religious preferences at this time of year when planning performances or other winter activities.

S*N*O*W D*A*Y*S & H*O*U*R*S guidance revisited

As administrators you all know that there is no right way to cancel school – whether it’s a late start, early out, or school closing altogether you will not make everyone happy. But now that school districts and accredited nonpublic schools have the option of choosing a school calendar based on days or based on hours hopefully this will provide you with more flexibility in making these difficult decisions. Now that you have more flexibility it’s time to revisit our previous guidance to school districts and accredited nonpublic schools on SNOW DAYS/HOURS, make-up days/ hours, and releases for athletic tournaments.

Remember, that SNOW DAYS/HOURS and makeup days/hours are only necessary to get to the minimum amount of instructional time required under Iowa Code section 256.7(19) which is 180 days of instruction or 1,080 hours of instruction. If you have the minimum amount of days or hours you are not required to make up the time. However, making up hours or days even if not needed is sound educational practice.

Question: May a school district and accredited nonpublic school lengthen the school day to make up for days or hours missed as a result of inclement weather?

Answer:

Days Calendar – No. A school days consist of a minimum of 6 hours of instructional time for all grades 1 through 12. Lengthening the day would not add to your days of school.

Hours Calendar - Yes. A school district or an accredited nonpublic school may add hours or minutes of instruction onto the beginning of the day or the end of the day to make-up time.

Question: May a school district or an accredited nonpublic school make up snow *days or hours* on weekends?

Answer: Yes. Whether or not you are on a days based calendar or an hours based calendar Iowa Code section 279.10 does not designate what days of the week are official “school days”.

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Legal Lessons continued

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Question: A school district or an accredited nonpublic school has parent-teacher conferences planned on a Tuesday and Thursday evening yet to come in the school's calendar. Staff and students will also go to the school on Friday of that same week. May the district or school count the hours spent on parent-teacher conference Tuesday and Thursday night as another day of student instruction on Saturday (a fifth consecutive day, Tuesday through Saturday) -- even though staff and students would not attend school on Saturday?

Answer:

Days Calendar - Yes. 281 IAC 12.1(9) provides for this exception as long as the five consecutive days equals **30 hours** of student instruction. Remember, parent-teacher conference time counts as student instruction.

Hours Calendar --NA.

Question: May a school district or accredited nonpublic school add parent-teacher conference time that was not in the original school calendar and count that time toward student instructional days or instructional hours.

Answer: No.

Question: May local school boards forgive snow make-up days or hours?

Answer: No, if the district/school is below the minimum of 180 days or 1,080 hours. Yes, if the district/school is beyond the minimum without counting the days/hours missed. However, making up hours or days even if not needed is sound educational practice.

Question: May a school district or accredited nonpublic school get a waiver from the Department of Education to NOT make up snow days or hours.

Answer: No. The DE has no such authority.

Question: Must a school district or accredited nonpublic school make up days or hours when weather forces it to start late or let out early?

Answer:

Days Calendar - No. Iowa Code section 256.7(19) states that a full day of instruction may be recorded if "emergency health or safety factors require the late arrival or early dismissal of students on a specific day." However, a local school board could decide voluntarily to make up the time that is lost by late starts and early dismissals. Making up these days -- especially if a district or school has had more than a couple of them -- is sound educational practice.

Hours Calendar - No. Under the hours calendar a district is not required to make up hours as long as they meet the minimum of 1,080 hours. However, a local school board could decide voluntarily to make up the time that is lost by late starts and early dismissals. Making up these hours -- especially if a district or school has had more than a couple of them -- is sound educational practice.

Question: If "early bird" students come to school on what becomes a "snow day" but no other students are bused to the school, may a day or hour of student instruction be counted?

Answer: No. 281 IAC 12.1(10) states that "A day or hour of attendance shall be a day or hour during which students were present and under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff. In addition, all grade levels of the school or school district must be operated and available for attendance by all students."

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Legal Lessons continued

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Question: Does a school district or accredited nonpublic school have to run the buses to count the day as a day of student instruction or an hour as an hour of student instruction?

Answer: Yes. Not only do the buses have to run, but students also need to be "under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff." All grade levels of the school or school district must be operated and available for attendance by all students. This implies that students must be in classes for some period of time prior to early release. See 281 IAC 12.1(10) and Iowa Code section 285.1(8). OAG #93-11-8.

Question: Do seniors have to make up "snow days"?

Answer: This is a local decision. Iowa Code 279.10 states, "the school district or accredited nonpublic school may excuse a graduating senior who has met district or school requirements for graduation from attendance during the extended school calendar." NOTE, however, that rule 281—IAC 12.1(7) requires that there be a board policy to excuse seniors from making up "snow days."

Question: If a school district or accredited nonpublic school closes due to health reasons (e.g., influenza contagion), does it follow the "snow days" rules?

Answer:

Days Calendar - Yes. Full days that are missed must be made up if the district does not have 180 days of instruction. If a school district or accredited nonpublic school has early dismissal or late start due to emergency health issues, the district may count the day as a full instructional day if on a days based calendar. Remember also that if just a classroom or attendance center is closed for emergency health or safety reasons, while the remainder of the district is in operation, the day may be counted as a day of school.

Hours Calendar - Yes. Hours that are missed must be made up if the district does not have 1,080 hours of instruction. If a school district or accredited nonpublic school has early dismissal or late start due to emergency health issues, the district may count the hours of attendance if on an hours based calendar. Remember also that if just a classroom or attendance center is closed for emergency health or safety reasons, while the remainder of the district is in operation, the hours may be counted as an hour of school.

Question: May a school district or accredited nonpublic school let out school for athletic tournaments and other competitions and still count the day as a day of student instruction or an hour as an hour of student instruction?

Answer:

Days Calendar - Yes, but only if the district keeps each building open and available for attendance by all students, and students in all grade levels are "under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff" as described in 281 IAC 12.1(8). The answer is "no" if an attendance center or district is closed.

Hours Calendar - Yes, but only if the district keeps each building open and available for attendance by all students, and students in all grade levels are "under the guidance and instruction of the instructional professional staff" as described in 281 IAC 12.1(8). The answer is "no" if an attendance center or district is closed.

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Foreign exchange students (those with a J-1 Visa)

We have received an a lot of calls this fall from districts and from programs that sponsor foreign exchange students, so here is a summary of what you need to know about educating these students.

1. **A district does not have to enroll a foreign exchange student.** Pursuant to Iowa Code sections 282.1 and 282.6, a district must provide a free appropriate public education to all “actual residents between the ages of 5 and 21 years” who have not met graduation requirements. Foreign exchange students (those with a J-1 Visa) are NOT Iowa residents. They are not in Iowa to make a permanent home, and there is no special exemption in the law making them residents for school purposes. In addition, some of these young folks have already graduated from a high school back home. A district may have board policy that defines foreign exchange students as “residing temporarily in the district” and as, therefore, eligible for a free education if they have not already met graduation requirements elsewhere and do not have F-1 visa status (a non-exchange visa).
2. **A district that accepts foreign exchange students may charge tuition.** Because they are not Iowa residents, you may charge tuition as a condition of enrollment, and you are required by federal law to charge tuition for those few non-exchange foreign students who hold an F-1 visa. Also, if a student has graduated already, you must charge tuition before s/he may attend your district.
3. **Do not include foreign exchange students in your enrollment count.** As you may remember, the Department proposed legislation at one time that would have allowed districts to count J-1 visa-holders (which is the majority of foreign exchange students) on their certified enrollments, but the bill did not come out of committee. Thus, you may not count any foreign exchange students.
4. **Communicate with the sponsors of these programs.** Some districts set a limit as to the number of foreign exchange students they will accept, which is perfectly fine. Just make certain to communicate your decisions *in advance* to sponsors of foreign exchange students. Let them know if you will enroll such students, if you plan to charge tuition to those who have not yet graduated, and how (if you have a limit) students will be selected and if there is a deadline in your district for enrollment of foreign exchange students. This will go a long way in avoiding hard feelings.
5. **Do not confuse foreign exchange students with non-citizen residents.** If you have families residing in your district who are not U.S. citizens, you must provide a free education to the school age children of those families. The U.S. Supreme Court has made it clear that it does not matter whether the families are in your district legally or otherwise. Children living with their families in your district are entitled to FAPE. The only inquiry you may make is whether their residence is within your district’s boundaries. If these families are migratory, you still must provide a free education to their school age children because they do not have a residence elsewhere; therefore, they meet the statutory definition of being residents of your district.
6. **Athletic Eligibility.** Foreign exchange students (those with J-1 visas) shall have immediate eligibility to participate “unless undue influence was exerted to place the child for primarily athletic purposes.” However, those non-exchange students with an F-1 visa must sit out for 90 days.

If you have other questions on foreign exchange students or VISAS, here is [FAQs on Non-Immigrant Foreign Students](#). For questions on non-immigrants students, here is an article in legal on [Education of Nonimmigrant Children](#).

Students with disabilities

For questions regarding students with disabilities please contact Thomas Mayes at 515-242-5614 or thomas.mayes@iowa.gov.

Calendar

- December 1 • SBRC Application for Modified Supplemental Amount (MSA) for Increased Enrollment, Open Enrollment Out, and Limited English Proficient beyond 5 years of weighting, for districts that want MSA (IAC 289--6.3(3)"h") deadline
- December 1 • Last date for an election to reorganize effective July 1: 1st Tuesday in December (even numbered years), 1st Tuesday after 1st Monday in November (odd numbered years effective November 2019)
- December 1 • First semester parental claim forms for nonpublic transportation reimbursement due
- December 15 • Deadline for Dropout Verification Certification
- December 15 • Deadline for At-Risk/Dropout Application for Modified Supplemental Amount



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